

Quevedo, Reader of Erasmus

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«Del veneno hizo medicina».
Francisco de Quevedo, *Providencia de Dios*

In my recent book *Ambiguous Antidotes: Virtue as Vaccine for Vice in Early Modern Spain*¹, I was able to trace a genealogy of the notion of virtue as *pharmakon*—an ambiguous antidote which is both poison and cure. Originally Platonic in origin, the concept was made famous by French deconstructionist Jacques Derrida in his essay «Plato's Pharmacy»:

This *pharmakon*, this «medicine», this philter, which acts as both remedy and poison, already introduces itself into the body of the discourse with all its ambivalence. This charm, this spellbinding virtue, this power of fascination, can be—alternatively or simultaneously—beneficent or maleficent. The *pharmakon* would be a *substance*—with all that that word can connote in terms of matter with occult virtues, cryptic depths refusing to submit their ambivalence to analysis, already paving the way for alchemy— if we didn't have eventually to come to recognize it as antisubstance itself².

The *pharmakon*, or ambiguous antidote, appears over and over in early modern Spain's dramatic corpus. For example, Eco in Calderón's *Eco y Narciso* announces, «Lo que fue veneno en ellos / será medicina en él»³. Sometimes a poison becomes a medicine, but other times a medicine becomes a poison, as in «a veces el antídoto es veneno»⁴. This doubling back of the ambiguous substance upon itself is particularly

1. Kallendorf, 2017a.

2. Derrida, 1981, p. 70.

3. Calderón, *Eco y Narciso*, Jornada 3, vv. 2250-2251, p. 51.

4. Lope de Vega, *La francesilla*, Acto 3, fol. 133r.

frequent in the context of those who suffer from wounds inflicted by snakes or other poisonous animals, such as «aquel / que está herido de un veneno / y otro veneno le cura»⁵. Another common subcategory within this discourse is the set of various permutations and combinations which become possible when two or more ambiguous antidotes are mixed together. For instance,

También de dos peregrinas
hierbas oí, que en sus senos,
apartadas son venenos,
y juntas son medicinas⁶.

Whole plays were written about this topic, such as *Enfermar con el remedio*, a collaborative effort by the three playwrights Calderón de la Barca, Luis Vélez de Guevara, and Jerónimo Cáncer⁷. Specifically, in a metaphorical extension of medical discourse into the realm of morality, Virtue is described as a *pharmakon* in these dramas, as in the line, «tan alta virtud, en vez / de antídoto, ser veneno»⁸.

While the main source materials for my book-length study were *comedias* and *autos sacramentales*, it seemed to me when I was writing it that so prevalent a discourse could probably also be found in other types of texts from this period. Following a hunch I developed while working on another study I did of Quevedo recently (an essay titled «¿*Virtud militante* o virtud debilitante? Quevedo y la ambigüedad moral»⁹), I decided to find out whether this *topos* might also appear somewhere in Quevedo's *oeuvre*. Sure enough, I was in luck.

Quevedo partakes explicitly of the discourse of the *pharmakon* in *Providencia de Dios (Tratado de la inmortalidad del alma y Tratado de la divina providencia)* (1641-1642). The passage in question reads as follows:

No hay veneno en hierba, ave, pez, animal, piedra o metal, en quien el buen uso no halle salud y remedio, si el malo halla peste y contagio. El napelo es tósigo y ponzoña de los campos, y alimento de las codornices. Venenosa es la cicuta: con ella murió Aníbal, el más valiente capitán general que padeció Roma; con ella engordan las gallinas. Venenos son el azogue, el antimonio, el tártaro y el diagridis; y preparados, son purgas que eficaces contradicen la enfermedad, desembarazándola en las oficinas del cuerpo de los humores discordes y demasiados. Los alacranes son médicos de sí mismos; así los escorpiones. La araña, horror y asco de la vista (que, contenta con la noche de un agu-

5. Calderón, *Mañanas de abril y mayo*, Jornada 1, vv. 213-215, p. 60.

6. Calderón, *Las tres justicias en una*, Jornada 1 (printed as a *suelta* with no line or page numbers).

7. Calderón, Vélez de Guevara y Cáncer, 1730[?]. Printed as a *suelta*. Currently held by the Wilson Rare Books Library at the University of Minnesota.

8. Calderón, *El Maestrazgo del Tusón*, *Loa for auto sacramental*, p. 408.

9. Kallendorf, 2017b.

jero, atesora en las enemistades con la luz ponzoña rabiosa) aprisionada en la cáscara de una nuez sabe atajar la porfiada tarea de la cuartana. La víbora, que en los círculos de su cuerpo se flecha arco y saeta homicida, en la triaca se opone a las heridas de su diente. No de otra manera los tesoros, las felicidades, las honras, los grandes puestos, la pobreza, la calamidad, el abatimiento, *son venenos en unos y remedios y antidotos en otros*. En el efecto que hacen, no en el nombre que tienen, está la verdad de lo que son¹⁰.

This excerpt is surprising for several reasons: it shows a more detailed knowledge of pharmacy and medicine than we might have guessed Quevedo would have, and it also demonstrates a potential moral relativism in the context of Virtue. This is the discourse of casuistry in action: substances are not defined here in absolute terms as good or bad in and of themselves, but instead in relative terms according to their use. Like the venom which cures a snake bite, even something so 'inherently' evil as poison can be repurposed to our advantage. In the moral realm, Quevedo says this poison might be the equivalent of riches (treasures), honors, or lofty positions. Contradicting the ascetics, Quevedo maintains that these wordly *desiderata* are not necessarily bad. Like poison used as medicine, they can be employed toward either positive or negative ends.

OTHER QUEVEDESQUE ALLUSIONS TO THE *PHARMAKON*

This is not the first time Quevedo had employed the discourse of the *pharmakon*. This notion appears likewise in the fourth part of his treatise *Virtud militante. Contra las cuatro pestes del mundo, Envidia, Ingratitud, Soberbia, Avaricia* (1634-1637), in a section devoted to Avarice. In this instance, the allusion reads as follows:

Muchas veces nace de la avaricia la soberbia, y la envidia, y la ingratitud. Y de cualquiera de ellas las otras, y en cada una las padece el apestado. Todas son recíprocas, y contagio pariente. Que raramente se apartan. No dejan salud en el alma donde entran ni seguridad en el cuerpo, de que se apoderan. *Con las medicinas suelen alimentar, y crecer su veneno*, por esto son grandemente peligrosas¹¹.

If medicine makes the sickness worse rather than better, then it really is no medicine at all. Quevedo continues in this vein with further comparisons between morality and medicine, such as the admonition, «Considerad a este avariento haciendo salud todas sus pestes, y virtudes todos sus pecados»¹². If illness is really health, and sin is really virtue, then easy moral binaries vanish.

10. Quevedo, *Providencia de Dios*, pp. 248-250.

11. Quevedo, *Virtud militante*, p. 167.

12. Quevedo, *Virtud militante*, p. 169.

A COMMON SOURCE: ERASMUS

Now the question arises: was there a common source for Quevedo and the dramatists mentioned earlier? It could be a simple proverb such as «todo mal se cura con otro semejante», a maxim still repeated in Spain to this day¹³. But I would like to at least entertain the possibility that these playwrights and Quevedo were drinking from the same fountain, intertextually speaking. One possibility is that they were all surreptitiously reading Erasmus' *Enchiridion*, or at least recycling some of its ideas. This book was wildly popular in Spain before it was banned¹⁴. In this manual for the Christian soldier, the Dutch humanist employs the exact language of the *pharmakon* in the specific context of Virtue and Vice:

Aprovecharte han también otros remedios, aunque más livianos. Así como cotejarte siempre con otros más excelentes que tú. Si estás muy contento de la hermosura de tu cuerpo, compárate con otros que en ella te hacen ventaja. Si el mucho saber te ensoberbece, pon ante los ojos a otros en cuya comparación te parecerá que no aprendiste letra. También hará algo al caso que eches la cuenta no de los bienes que te sobran, sino de los que te faltan, y si como san Pablo dice, olvidando lo que queda atrás te esfuerzas siempre por alcanzar lo de adelante. Allende de esto, no será mal consejo, si cuando el viento de la soberbia se levanta, *luego hagamos de nuestros males remedio y medicina para ellos mismos, como quien con una ponzoña alcanza otra*. Y esto se hará si tenemos algún señalado defecto corporal o si, por no poder más o por no saber más, hubiéramos antes caído en algún gran inconveniente que remuerda mucho nuestro corazón, y lo ponemos luego esto todo ante los ojos y, como hace el pavón, miramos principalmente en nosotros aquella parte en que seamos más disformes, y luego desharemos la rueda¹⁵.

This passage, taken from the Renaissance Spanish translation of Erasmus by Alfonso Fernández de Madrid, appears in the context of a section titled «Remedios contra la soberbia y altivez del corazón». The same treatise contains parallel sections on remedies against others of the Seven Deadly Sins (Lust, Avarice, Anger, etc.), along with some more non-traditional categories such as ambition, desire for honor, and appetite for revenge, which are not typically included in lists of the Capital Vices. The idea here is that even a 'poison' such as sin is not necessarily bad in itself, for it can be employed toward virtuous ends. Specifically,

13. Pérez Bautista, 1968, p. 190.

14. «In 1526 Alfonso Fernández de Madrid, the archdeacon of Alcor, who had undertaken the translation of the *Enchiridion militis Christiani* two years earlier, wrote triumphantly to Erasmus that, whereas formerly the text had been read by the few who were skilled in Latin, "there is now hardly anyone who does not have in hand the Spanish version in the imperial court, in cities, in churches, in monasteries, and even in inns"» (Taylor and Coroleu, eds., 2010, p. 3. They cite *Opus Epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami*, 1906-1958, epistle 1904).

15. Erasmus, *Enchiridion*, p. 400.

one sin can be used to wipe out another one, in a rhetorical move which can only be characterized as a certain kind of moral flexibility.

QUEVEDO, CRITIC OF ERASMUS

Now, if I am right, and Quevedo did share some of these ideas with Erasmus, this would be surprising. We know he was aware of Erasmus' works and even that he used Erasmus' edition of the works of Seneca (Lyon, 1555), which interested him because of his profound preoccupation with Neo-Stoicism¹⁶. But by this time in Spain, Erasmus was labelled a heretic, while Quevedo is normally considered hyperorthodox. In fact, at various points in his works –both published texts and manuscript marginalia in copies of printed books which once belonged to his personal library– Quevedo openly criticizes Erasmus. In *Política de Dios* he calls him an «autor sospechoso», although he adds that some of his advice is «católicamente calificado»¹⁷. In *Virtud militante*, he accuses him of committing the Deadly Sin of Pride:

Muchas veces anda la soberbia en buen hábito, que no conociéndola pasa por virtud. Admirablemente, la penetró, arrebozada de celo católico, en Erasmo de Roterodamo, el doctísimo Ambrosio Catherino en el libro que intituló *Consideración, y juicio de los tiempos presentes*. Había Erasmo escrito un libro contra Lutero en defensa de la verdad católica, y opugnando su opinión del albedrío esclavo. Y en él condena las novedades, palabras y costumbres de Lutero, y de sus secuaces. ¿Quién no juzgará celo católico esta oposición tan afectuosa? Pero Ambrosio Catherino con el antojo largo de la verdad le desenvolvió de suerte que vio que era soberbia, y lo afirmó en el libro referido (Libr. 3) con estas palabras. Había empezado a bajar a esta tragedia Erasmo, mas se detuvo. Tuvo por afrenta aquel hombre soberbio militar debajo de la mano de Lutero, no se atrevió a pelear claramente contra la Iglesia, para ofenderla más con tal astucia. Verdaderamente son todos diabólicos los ardides de este infernal pecado¹⁸.

Similarly, in his *Vida de San Pablo Apóstol*, Quevedo decries Erasmus' views on marriage for priests¹⁹. On a related topic, he scribbles «Erasmicat Turpissime» in the margin of his copy of Saint Thomas More's *Utopia* next to a passage criticizing monks as venal²⁰. This means essentially that Quevedo coined a verb, *Erasmicare* (to Erasmianize), and used it to accuse saint Thomas More –who was indeed Erasmus' friend– of offending Catholic orthodoxy in this manner.

These criticisms of Erasmus by Quevedo have led scholars to assume that there was no intellectual affinity between these two figures. In

16. Ettinghausen, 1972, p. 62.

17. Quevedo, *Política de Dios*, p. 270.

18. Quevedo, *Virtud militante*, pp. 154-155.

19. Quevedo, *Vida de San Pablo Apóstol*, in *Obras completas*, Vol. I, p. 1471.

20. Peraita Huerta, 2004, n. 15, p. 327.

the words of Antonio Alatorre, «Quevedo no parece, con todo, muy aficionado a Erasmo; por el contrario, lo olvida o lo censura»²¹. Rudolph Schevill makes a similar assumption:

The profound theological erudition of Quevedo unquestionably had taught him early that all the works of Erasmus were banned; it seems therefore difficult to find any significant relation in the thought or style of these two satirists. Quevedo is more bitter and cynical; his wit is always mordant; Erasmus is given to a more restrained and gayer tone. Thus with difficulty can we trace in the tormented spirit of the great Spanish satirist any of that profound inner peace of the Dutch humanist. The *Política de Dios y gobierno de Cristo*, which constitutes a doctrine of Christian government for a king, recalls by its title the *Institutio principis christiani* of Erasmus. But Quevedo's book is concerned chiefly with government by the king, according to the words of the Gospels. Erasmus stresses the basic principles which make a Christian prince fit to rule, and, consequently, emphasizes the spiritual education and character of the ruler himself²².

In his classic work of scholarship *Erasmo y España*, Marcel Bataillon appears to leave the door open to contemplating Erasmian influence on Quevedo, but only slightly. He offers the following nuanced assessment:

El caso de Quevedo es mucho más complejo [...] [E]n él se ve renacer esa alianza de un íntimo sentimiento cristiano con un humor burlón, que es tan característico del erasmismo. Y sin embargo, no parece que Erasmo lo haya seducido²³.

He reiterates later, after mentioning that strange combination of religious fervor and acerbic satire apparent in works by Quevedo like the *Buscón* and *El Sueño del Juicio Final*: «Hay en todo esto, algo que hace pensar en Erasmo y que está a cien leguas de la manera de Erasmo»²⁴.

QUEVEDO, READER OF ERASMUS

However, at various points in his works Quevedo does rehearse Erasmian ideas, even if he does not acknowledge this influence openly²⁵. In an essay titled «Quevedo, Erasmo y el Doctor Constantino», Antonio Alatorre traces the debt owed by Quevedo to Erasmus' *Praeparatio ad mortem* when it came to writing his own *La cuna y la sepultura*²⁶. Alatorre took his cue for writing this essay from the following remark by Marcel

21. Alatorre, 1953, p. 673.

22. Schevill, 1937, p. 117.

23. Bataillon, 1966, pp. 774-775.

24. Bataillon, 1966, p. 776.

25. In only rare instances does Quevedo proffer to Erasmus an actual compliment. This does occur, however, in *España defendida de los tiempos de ahora*, where he uses the adjective «doctísimo» to describe the Dutch humanist (Quevedo, *España defendida*, p. 162).

26. Alatorre, 1953, pp. 673-674.

Bataillon, whose book *Erasmus y España* Alatorre translated from the French into Spanish:

Erasmus y los erasmistas españoles hubieran amado seguramente el tratado que Quevedo intituló *La cuna y la sepultura*: hubieran reconocido una piedad hermana de la suya, en su afán de perfeccionar la filosofía estoica con la verdad cristiana²⁷.

Alatorre develops this connection fully in his article, analyzing Erasmus' *ars moriendi* treatise as a source for Quevedo's *La cuna y la sepultura* along with a sermon by Constantino Ponce de la Fuente which he also considers to be an important influence on Quevedo.

Likewise, Manuel Ariza Canales has read Quevedo's *Política de Dios y gobierno de Cristo* in light of Erasmus' *Institutio principis christiani* in an essay titled «Metáforas del poder: iconografía de la política cristiana en Erasmo y Quevedo»²⁸. His article was actually a summary of a longer argument which he had developed previously into a full-length book²⁹. He affirms regarding this intertextual relationship:

Aunque Francisco de Quevedo no hace alarde de ninguna afinidad erasmista, prudencia necesaria en quien pretendía salvar los barrotes de la censura de su tiempo, un cotejo, una lectura comparada de la *Educación del príncipe cristiano* y de *Política de Dios y gobierno de Cristo* revela los lazos de profunda familiaridad que ligan a ambas obras³⁰.

Focusing on the same text by Quevedo, but identifying a different Erasmian source, Carmen Peraita has likewise compared *Política de Dios* to Erasmus' *De duplici copia verborum ac rerum* (Paris, Josse Bade, 1512) with regard to rhetorical structure³¹. She asserts:

la «desusada» configuración discursiva de la *Política de Dios* tiene una clara raigambre humanista —que Quevedo, en opinión de algunos, quizá desvirtúe— y, en especial, cierta afinidad con ideas lingüísticas y retóricas erasmianas³².

Imitating the very rhetorical structures she studies, she proves her point with an abundance of convincing arguments.

Another one of Quevedo's works containing clear traces of Erasmian thought is the *Defensa de Epicuro*. This text was a Christian humanist attempt to reconcile Christian faith with classical Epicurean philosophy.

27. Bataillon, 1966, p. 775.

28. Ariza Canales, 1996, pp. 293-302.

29. Ariza Canales, 1995.

30. Ariza Canales, 1996, p. 298.

31. Peraita, 1999.

32. Peraita, 1999, p. 210.

According to this text's modern editor, Eduardo Acosta Méndez, it is possible to draw a clear line between Erasmus as initiator and Quevedo as epitome of this trend:

[S]i se sigue el hilo conductor de la influencia de Erasmo en nuestros círculos religiosos, literarios y filosóficos [...] podemos explicarnos, sin duda, con cierto fundamento la génesis de una progresiva aceptación de la doctrina de Epicuro, que habría de culminar más tarde en la pública apología del filósofo que don Francisco de Quevedo realizó poniendo el énfasis, al modo de Erasmo, en su supuesto acercamiento a la doctrina cristiana³³.

Here we see that Quevedo, in his efforts to reconcile pagan philosophy with Christian truth, effectively became an intellectual heir to Erasmus.

But perhaps the text by Quevedo which has generated the most interest with regard to its possible Erasmian intertexts is his picaresque classic *Historia de la vida del Buscón llamado don Pablos*, which has been analyzed by Antonio Vilanova in two chapters of his book *Erasmo y Cervantes*³⁴. In the first of these chapters, «Quevedo y Erasmo en el *Buscón*», Vilanova ventures the assertion,

La más significativa coincidencia entre Quevedo y Erasmo, se encuentra, en la obra satírica quevedesca, en la mezcla constante de un íntimo sentimiento cristiano con un humor burlón, muy característico del erasmismo. [...] [E]l rasgo más genuinamente erasmiano del *Buscón* es el irreverente desenfado con que se burla de las cosas de la religión, con una mezcla de audacia y de cinismo a menudo rayana en la impiedad [...] [L]a idea central de la agria novela picaresca de Quevedo, responde más bien a la honda preocupación sociológica y moral que inspira buena parte del *Moriae Encomium* y de los *Coloquios familiares* de Erasmo³⁵.

The specific Erasmian intertext he considers in this first chapter is a colloquy bearing the Latin title *Ementita nobilitas* (Feigned or pretended nobility), which was not included in the Spanish translation of Erasmus' colloquies (*Coloquios familiares*) that appeared in Seville in 1529³⁶. This suggests that Quevedo would have had to use the original Latin version, but this would not have posed a problem for the humanist. Vilanova confirms,

Ementita nobilitas [...] es uno de los coloquios erasmianos que han influido más decisivamente en el episodio del escudero del *Lazarillo*, antes de proporcionar a Quevedo uno de los principales estímulos inspiradores del *Buscón*. [...] En relación con las ventajas que ofrece el hecho de alternar con

33. Acosta Méndez, 1986, p. xxxix.

34. Vilanova, 1989a and 1989b.

35. Vilanova, 1989a, p. 501.

36. Published by Juan Cromberger.

personajes de la nobleza para ser tomado por uno de ellos y hacerse pasar por un caballero, el coloquio erasmiano *Ementita nobilitas* contiene otras recomendaciones útiles que el genio humorístico y satírico de Quevedo ha desarrollado por su cuenta de forma plenamente original. [...] Buena parte de los motivos temáticos mediante los cuales el gran escritor nos muestra las sorprendentes habilidades del Buscón en el arte de la simulación, la impostura y el engaño, se encuentran previamente apuntados [...] en las páginas de *Ementita nobilitas*³⁷.

Vilanova goes on to trace specific word borrowings, such as Erasmus' phrase «*rubet sanguis anserinus aeque atque humanus*», which Quevedo renders «buena sangre [...] todos la tienen colorada»³⁸. Quevedo actually repeats this idea in his *Sueño del infierno*, with a slight variation. There it appears in the form, «Toda la sangre, hidalguillo, es colorada»³⁹.

In the next chapter of his book, ostensibly written about Erasmus and Cervantes (but two chapters of which are actually devoted to the intertextual relationship between Erasmus and Quevedo), Vilanova identifies a different work by Erasmus with equally strong resonances for *El Buscón*. It is another colloquy, this time *Opulentia sordida* (Sordid opulence), published in 1531, with autobiographical relevance for Erasmus, who wrote it after allegedly suffering deprivation during his stay in the home of the miserly Andrea Torresani di Asola, father-in-law to the Venetian printer Aldus Manutius, in 1508. Vilanova sees this portrait of the greedy miser, inspired by Aldus' father-in-law, repeated in none other than the *pícaro* Don Pablos' schoolmaster, the Dómine Cabra. Vilanova explains:

Evidentemente, ni el hecho de comer primero a los señores, ni el reducido número de comensales, constituyen coincidencias especialmente relevantes y significativas como para establecer la menor relación de dependencia entre el capítulo quevedesco del *Buscón* y *Opulentia sordida*. Existe, sin embargo, en torno a la insuficiencia y frugalidad de la comida en casa de Antronio —consistente en un poco de caldo muy claro, pan duro, algo de queso y vino hecho con heces disueltas en agua— un rasgo irónico en intencionado, lleno de extraordinaria comicidad, cuyo recuerdo aparece en el *Buscón*, y que nos revela de manera inequívoca que Quevedo ha tenido presente el coloquio erasmiano⁴⁰.

Later he reiterates, «el esquema estructural que preside la ordenación y utilización de estos materiales procede claramente del modelo literario y libresco que ha proporcionado previamente el coloquio erasmiano»⁴¹.

37. Vilanova, 1989b, pp. 512, 517, 521.

38. Quevedo, *El Buscón*, pp. 188-189; quoted in Vilanova, 1989b, p. 514.

39. Quevedo, *Sueños y Discursos*, p. 123; quoted in Vilanova, 1989b, p. 514.

40. Vilanova, 1989a, p. 562.

41. Vilanova, 1989a, p. 564.

The complexities of Quevedo's intertextual relationship with Erasmus have perhaps best been summarized by Doris Baum, who offers the following shrewd analysis:

From Quevedo's comments, it is evident that he had read the works of the great humanist and that he admired his vast learning. Nonetheless, in each reference he makes to Erasmus, Quevedo finds faults to criticize, i.e., he accuses him of mocking Spanish pronunciation, of being excessively proud, and of maliciously defending an unorthodox view of marriage of saints and clergymen. Judging purely from his references to Erasmus by name, it must be concluded that Quevedo felt a basic antipathy toward Erasmus' personality and that he mistrusted his orthodoxy as a Catholic, although he does not specifically refer to him as a heretic. Quevedo's religious traditionalism caused him to criticize Erasmus and consciously to avoid any overt and unconditional praise of his ideas. However, a close reading of Quevedo's work proves that subconsciously, or at least silently, he himself was a follower of the Erasmian approach to spiritual reform and moral revitalization. [...] Quevedo was too much of a conservative in matters of religious orthodoxy to approve of Erasmus himself. However, Quevedo's own writing demonstrates a distinctly Erasmian tendency to bring practical Christian *mores* back to their purest state⁴².

This seems to me the most even-handed and responsible portrayal to date of Quevedo's admittedly complex and often contradictory views.

Faced with this array of evidence, perhaps it should not come as such a surprise to us that Quevedo echoes Erasmus as well concerning the *pharmakon*. The idea of venom which could also serve as medicine (and *vice versa*) would certainly have appealed to him, given what we know already about the potential slipperiness of his moral discourse. As I suggested in my essay «¿*Virtud militante* o virtud debilitante? Quevedo y la ambigüedad moral», the supposedly dogmatic Quevedo might not have been so rigid when it came to morality after all. He displays a certain moral flexibility in *Virtud militante* by employing a casuistical register to describe Vices which can actually become Virtues and Virtues which can turn into Vices. As I explained there,

Virtud militante [...] contiene rasgos de la síntesis de fuentes paganas y cristianas que habían caracterizado sus escritos más tempranos. El resultado (quizás no intencionado o consciente por parte del autor) es cierta ambigüedad moral que podemos tratar como «residuo» en su pensamiento. [...] Sea o no deliberada, dicha ambigüedad efectivamente desdice o subvierte el mensaje rigurosamente moralizante de la obra. La consecuencia es un texto híbrido que más bien parece un palimpsesto. Bajo la capa superficial se pueden adivinar siempre rasgos de otras etapas previas de su formación y pensamiento. El producto es un texto que a veces carece de perfecta consistencia porque está en constante movimiento⁴³.

42. Baum, 1970, pp. 99-100.

43. Kallendorf, 2017b, p. 64.

I am not the first scholar to make some of these claims. As Carmen Peraita suggests, «la reflexión quevediana contrapone [...] preceptos y avisos no siempre ortodoxos»⁴⁴. Ariadna García-Bryce refers to Quevedo's «performance» of piety⁴⁵, specifically in *Política de Dios*, while Beatriz Gutiérrez Mueller hears Bakhtinian «occult dialogue»⁴⁶ in his *Tratado de la inmortalidad del alma*, published in modern editions as the first part of his *Providencia de Dios*. Rafael Iglesias characterizes Quevedo as practicing «defensive dissimulation» in both *Cómo ha de ser el privado* and *El chitón de las tarabillas*⁴⁷. In a thesis written about «ethical flexibility» in Quevedo and Gracián, Alexander Zuckschwerdt sees the satirist as more Protean than we might be inclined to believe if we follow the traditional, hyperorthodox stereotype. In her essay «Dogma and Disbelief in Quevedo's Poetry», Ariadna García-Bryce, in typical deconstructionist fashion, offers a third term or *aporia* for escaping the binarism of her title:

Ignatian dogmatism and conceptist wit are juxtaposed in a writing that in no way mitigates the ideological conflicts of the Counter-Reformation, a culture in the process of coming to terms with the difficulties of reconciling messianic ideals and pragmatic reason of state, or, in other terms, the outright imposition of absolute truth and the politic practice of duplicitous seduction⁴⁸.

In other words, Quevedo could sometimes espouse Catholic dogma while at other times expressing skepticism or disbelief. Finally, Raquel Sajón de Cuello, in an essay titled «Quevedo frente a la ortodoxia cristiana», dares to question whether Quevedo even believed in life after death⁴⁹. She piles up a series of unanswerable rhetorical questions:

¿Fue Quevedo un cristiano de ley? ¿Fue un religioso? ¿Compartió la ortodoxia de la Iglesia o es un renegado o descreído? ¿Dónde queda la Resurrección de Cristo?⁵⁰

She even claims to discern in Quevedo's soul a spiritual battleground, referring to «el conflictivo estado espiritual permanente de Quevedo; sus punzantes dudas y sus inútiles esfuerzos por alcanzar un equilibrio imposible de lograr»⁵¹. All of this simply goes to show that, as Ignacio Arellano intimates in «Quevedo, hombre de Dios, hom-

44. Peraita Huerta, 1999, p. 221.

45. García-Bryce, 2005.

46. Gutiérrez Mueller, 2015.

47. Iglesias, 2013.

48. García-Bryce, 2002, p. 537.

49. Sajón de Cuello, 1992.

50. Sajón de Cuello, 1992, p. 1104.

51. Sajón de Cuello, 1992, p. 1099.

bre del diablo», the humanist is not easy to pin down⁵². He may well have been a mass of contradictions –which only puts the ‘human’ back into humanism.

SAINT IGNATIUS AND THE JESUITS

Even if we find ourselves reluctant to accept the suggestion that Quevedo engaged in intellectual dialogue with Erasmus, it might be possible to arrive by a different route to the same place in terms of shared ideas. While not very much scholarly attention has been paid to Quevedo as reader of Erasmus, more ink has been spilled outlining his relationship to Saint Ignatius and the Jesuits. A series of essays by erudite philologists detail his epistolary correspondence with, and prose references to, specific members of the Company of Jesus⁵³, including two priests who seem to have been instrumental in securing more favorable prison conditions for him and, eventually, his release. Some time ago, renowned *quevedista* James Crosby announced to the scholarly world the existence of 42 letters written by Quevedo to the Jesuits Pedro Pimentel and Juan Antonio Velázquez⁵⁴ and then went on to publish an edition of those letters⁵⁵. But the most in-depth study of Quevedo’s relationship with, and attitudes toward, the Society of Jesus until recently was Ignacio Elizalde’s essay «Quevedo, San Ignacio de Loyola y los jesuitas»⁵⁶, superseded only last year by the Spanish translation of Christian Wehr’s book-length study of Saint Ignatius and Quevedo⁵⁷. By now it has been exhaustively demonstrated that Quevedo owed a profound debt of gratitude toward the Jesuits, who were responsible both for his early education and for his release from prison. His appreciation arguably remained a constant despite some rather visceral exchanges with individual priests such as Juan de Pineda, who criticized Quevedo’s *Política de Dios*, and two satirical poems Quevedo wrote about the festival celebrating the beatification of Saint Ignatius and the Jesuit practice of the *Spiritual Exercises*, respectively. As we say

52. Arellano, 2017, p. 5, expounds, «No me parece que todas esas contrariedades constituyan contradicciones. Un poeta barroco no escribe para expresar sus más íntimos sentimientos pensando en un público consumidor de sentimentalismos monofacéticos. Y un poeta como Quevedo cuya potencia verbal pocas veces ha sido igualada parece el más misógino, el más estoico, el más denso, el más difícil, el más devoto, el más maldito y bendito (esto algo menos) de todos los poetas. Ante los extremos de la estética ingeniosa quevediana el trabajo de los críticos siempre tiene retos que afrontar, vertientes que explorar y propuestas que ofrecer, necesariamente parciales, a menudo centradas en aspectos concretos o textos específicos capaces de ir construyendo el panorama global de una obra complicada que bascula en un arco de tan alejados extremos».

53. See, for example, Del Piero, 1958a and 1958b, and Sánchez Sánchez, 1994-1995.

54. Crosby, 1998.

55. Crosby, 2005.

56. Elizalde Armendáriz, 1980.

57. Wehr, 2017.

sometimes, the sign of an intelligent person is the ability to hold two contradictory things in mind simultaneously.

SAINT IGNATIUS, THE JESUITS AND ERASMUS

But what does all of this have to do with Erasmus? As Marcel Bataillon so ably demonstrated in «De Erasmo a la Compañía de Jesús»⁵⁸, it turns out that Erasmus may have been an unrecognized precursor to St. Ignatius. He suggests all-so-subtly:

Hay que ahondar en este problema, no porque Ignacio apareciese en algún momento de su vida como un erasmiano en el sentido propio del término, sino porque pudo haber entre la reforma ignaciana y la reforma erasmiana —probablemente las dos corrientes más fuertes de la reforma católica— ciertas concordancias parciales susceptibles de inquietar a un religioso muy apegado a su regla⁵⁹.

Bataillon goes on to unpack this web of associations by recalling that according to one of Ignatius' early biographers, Luís Gonçalves, the saint's confessor (Father Manuel Miona) recommended that he read Erasmus' *Enchiridion*. Now, it is true that this same hagiographer reports that Ignatius rejected this advice, preferring instead to read authors whose orthodoxy was not in question. But Bataillon interprets this moment of hagiographical image-fashioning as one we should perhaps not take too literally. In fact, according to his other biographer, Pedro de Ribadeneira, Ignatius' contact with Erasmus' work occurred not in the context of devotional reading but instead during his school days as part of his formal education in Latin grammar. They may not agree on the specifics, but his two earliest biographers concur on one essential point: Ignatius was aware of Erasmus, specifically his *Enchiridion militis christiani*, and was urged to read this tremendously popular text.

Bataillon was not the first to notice a resemblance between Ignatian meditative practice and Erasmus' kind of *devotio moderna*. Before him, Henri Watrigant had posed the problem of possible Erasmian influence on Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*⁶⁰. He was even able to guess about a possible textual linkage involving two specific early Spanish editions of Gerson's *Contemptus mundi* containing the Erasmian work *Sermón del Niño Jesús*, translated into Spanish. These editions, one published in Toledo in 1526 and another in Seville in 1528, are now known to the scholarly world only by rare surviving copies, some of which are mutilated⁶¹. Bataillon rehearses this evidence, concluding: «No es imposible,

58. Bataillon, 1977.

59. Bataillon, 1977, p. 205.

60. Watrigant, 1907.

61. This translation of Erasmus' work into Spanish was done by Diego de Alcocer. The Toledo edition was published by Miguel de Eguía in 1526, while the Seville edition was published by Juan Cromberger in 1528.

en efecto, que san Ignacio recordase la cuarta regla del *Enchiridion* al redactar sus famosas fórmulas»⁶².

Bataillon goes on to note other similarities between the two thinkers, including their affinity for martial metaphors to describe a very militant form of Christianity: «En cuanto a las metáforas militares caras a Ignacio [...] pueden proceder del *Enchiridion militis Christiani*»⁶³. Neither one of them was much interested in monasticism; Erasmus famously ended his *Enchiridion* with the phrase, «*Monachatus non est pietas*», while Ignatius was careful to avoid the trappings of monastic life, including monks' robes or habits. Bataillon mentions other linkages, such as Ignatius' aversion to having the Jesuits call each other 'Father' or 'Brother', which he sees as a possible echo of Erasmus' objection to such appellations as expressed in the adage *Sileni Alcibiadis*. Furthermore, interestingly, both Erasmus and Ignatius objected to singing or chanting during the mass.

The problem still remains: if Ignatius was influenced early on by certain ideas of the Dutch humanist, then why did he later prohibit the use of his works in Jesuit colleges? Bataillon points out that this did not happen until 1555, toward the end of Ignatius' life, when the Society of Jesus found itself in crisis⁶⁴. He suggests that, effectively, the 'damage' was already done in terms of Erasmian ideas infiltrating the mind of the Jesuits' founder at a seminal moment, before he ever wrote his *Spiritual Exercises* or established his order formally, let alone founding a single college.

Bataillon ultimately opts for a relatively moderate stance in this debate, putting forward the following compromise: «la reforma erasmiana y la reforma ignaciana seguían caminos distintos, pero paralelos»⁶⁵. He even admits that «había entre la piedad erasmiana y la piedad iñiguista una profunda diferencia, capaz de convertirse más tarde en antagonismo»⁶⁶. He acknowledges that Ignatius was fundamentally a man of action; Erasmus, a man of letters. But he is not willing to concede the basic point that Ignatius was advised by his confessor to read Erasmus' *Enchiridion*. He feels the goal of this assignment was not –as his early biographer Ribadeneira would have it– to imitate his elegant Latin, but instead to expose him to the intellectual appeal of Erasmus' ideas:

Miona aconseja la lectura del *Enchiridion* no para formar a Ignacio en las elegancias latinas, sino porque él mismo es un iluminado erasmizante, muy vinculado al grupo de Bernardino Tovar, el hermanastro de Juan de Vergara⁶⁷.

62. Bataillon, 1977, p. 210.

63. Bataillon, 1977, p. 211.

64. See Bataillon, 1977, p. 218: «la prohibición de los libros de Erasmo en los colegios de la Compañía [...] se sitúa en 1555, muy al final de la vida de Ignacio y cuando la Compañía atravesaba una crisis grave».

65. Bataillon, 1977, p. 213.

66. Bataillon, 1977, p. 213.

67. Bataillon, 1977, p. 215.

By investigating the confessor Miona's biography, Bataillon demonstrates with compelling evidence a firm link between the Dutch humanist and the founder of the Society of Jesus. He underlines this connection with the detail, provided by Ignatius' biographer Gonçalves, that the saint was exposed to Erasmus' manual for the Christian soldier in none other than Alcalá, long recognized to have been the primary hotbed of Erasmianism in Spain at this time⁶⁸. He summarizes his position:

Queda sin embargo en pie que el fundador de la Compañía, en los tiempos de su primera empresa de apostolado, vivió en un ambiente muy impregnado del *Enchiridion*, y que la influencia de este ambiente, al ejercerse por medio de un confesor respetado, pudo y debió confirmarle en su intención de desarrollar su acción apostólica fuera del marco del monaquismo⁶⁹.

This biographical connection is fortified by the fact that Ignatius maintained contact with known disciples of Erasmus, such as the Spanish humanist Juan Luis Vives⁷⁰. Thus we see that even if Quevedo did not obtain some of his ideas directly from Erasmus, he could have still been exposed to them indirectly by means of Saint Ignatius and the Jesuits.

CONCLUSION

So where does all of this leave us with regard to early modern reading practices? What does this example tell us about textual alliances which were forged and then denied?

In line with work by the North American school of literary criticism known as the New Historicism, it may help to view Quevedo's careful positioning of himself within this web of associations as a form of textual self-fashioning. Stephen Greenblatt defines several key features of this practice which are applicable here:

Self-fashioning is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange, or hostile. This threatening Other —heretic, savage, witch, adulteress, traitor, Antichrist— must be discovered or invented in order to be attacked and destroyed [...] The power generated to attack the alien in the name of the authority is produced in excess and threatens the authority it sets out to defend. Hence self-fashioning always involves some experience of threat, some effacement or undermining, some loss of self⁷¹.

68. Bataillon, 1977, p. 217: «sin duda fue en Alcalá donde Miona aconsejó a Ignacio que se impregnara del *Enchiridion*».

69. Bataillon, 1977, p. 218.

70. De Nicolas, 1986, p. 17. De Nicolas clarifies his view of Ignatius' alliances (1986, p. 63): «Ignatius avoided controversy and controversial Christians (St. Juan de Avila, Erasmus) but without fear aligned himself with pagan humanism in his program of education».

71. Greenblatt, 1980, p. 9. Greenblatt's concept of self-fashioning has been applied recently to Spain in a collection of essays titled *Self-Fashioning and Assumptions of Identity in Early Modern Iberia*, edited by Delbrugge, 2015.

What if Quevedo went out of his way to attack Erasmus precisely because he was trying to hide something? What if his intellectual debt to Erasmus was greater than he cared to acknowledge?

We will probably never know the true extent to which Erasmian ideas influenced Quevedo's thought. But it seems safe to assume that whatever debt he did owe, he would never have broadcast this connection. To do so would have been the literary / political equivalent of ingesting poison –which, let us not forget, was the means of Socrates' death. Only this time the Erasmian 'poison' he ingested turns out to produce salutiferous medicine for us. *Del veneno hizo medicina*.

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